



## Introduction to LWV for New Members

### **Our Mission Statement:**

LWV, a nonpartisan political organization, encourages informed and active participation in government and influences public policy through education and advocacy.

## Welcome to the League of Women Voters Minnesota!

You are now a member of a vital and historic organization. The League has local, state and national levels, parallel to our three levels of government, and you are now a member of all three. You can work on local issues through your local League, state issues through the state League (LWV Minnesota), and on national issues through the national League (LWVUS).

Anyone who supports the mission of LWV is welcome and we strive to represent the entire community. In addition to meeting others who are also passionate about civic engagement, you will have opportunities to learn new skills and learn about public policy issues.

After some training, you can participate in as many activities as you have time and interest. They include (but are not limited to) registering new voters, helping voters update their registration information, moderating candidates' forums, observing meetings of government bodies, sitting on statewide public policy committees, interviewing elected officials, and researching and/or presenting information about an issue under study by your local, state, or national League.

As with any organization you join, attending meetings, participating in discussions, and giving financial support beyond your dues are encouraged.

The goal of the League of Women Voters is to empower people to shape better communities worldwide.

We:

- Build citizen participation in the democratic process.
- Study key issues at all government levels and act on them after members have come to agreement.
- Engage communities in promoting positive solutions to public policy issues through education and advocacy.

We believe in:

- Respect for individuals.
- The value of diversity.
- The power of collective decision making for the common good, both within the League and in communities.

We strive to:

- Act with trust, integrity and professionalism.
- Operate in an open and effective manner to meet the needs of those we serve, both our members and the public.
- Actively seek diversity in our membership.
- Acknowledge our heritage as we adapt to change and anticipate the future.

## **Non-Partisan and Grassroots**

LWV is a political organization that encourages members to participate fully in the party of their choice. But the League does not support or oppose any political party or any candidate for public office, even those in nonpartisan elections. League leaders who serve in more visible positions – President, and Voters Service Chair - are not permitted to support candidates in a public way (petitions, lawn signs, candidate coffees, etc.).

Each LWV Board of Directors drafts a nonpartisan policy that needs to be approved by the members. All members implement the policy in the community.

By "grassroots" we mean that each-and-every member of the League makes the policy decisions of LWV. From local LWV annual meetings to state conventions and the national convention, members decide on the direction and focus of League. Members choose the Boards of Directors and the officers who are responsible for carrying out these decisions

## **What is the member's place within the LWV?**

Every member is a member of all three levels of LWV: national, state, and local. Members work on local issues in the community through the local League; act on problems of state government through the state League; and work on national governmental issues through the national League. If LWV Minnesota or a local League is part of an ILO' (Inter-League Organization), a member could also work on the county level, a river basin, or a multistate metropolitan region depending on the geographic area represented by the ILO.

## **What kinds of activities are available for individual members?**

There are many opportunities for individual League members to learn about the LWV, participate in its deliberations and express personal points of view:

- Committees in the League can be local, state, or national and they offer members the opportunity to work on a League activity or to study an issue.
- Members can also work on state League committees like communications, membership, budget, nominations, voters service, inclusion, or action.
- Workshops /Trainings/Forums are open to all members. They can focus on a policy area, assist members in various leadership roles, or both. They often feature guest speakers and panelists.
- Monthly or semi - monthly meetings offer an opportunity for wide discussion and interchange of ideas; and allow the board to inform members of its plans and actions, to receive suggestions, vote on issues, and socialize.

## **Who is eligible for membership in the League of Women Voters?**

Anyone who wants to become informed about issues and actively participate in the democratic process may join the League. Voting members are at least 16 years of age. Some local Leagues offer associate membership to those under age 16.

## **Who joins the LWV?**

Anyone who supports the mission of the LWV:

- Your neighbor, friend, spouse, or co-worker;
- those who share your political affiliation;
- and those who don't.

There are no educational, social, economic, political, or racial barriers to membership. The League strives to be representative of the entire community.

## **What do I receive for paying my dues?**

When you pay your dues, you become a member of the national, state, and local Leagues. League offers you unlimited opportunities to make a difference, become a leader, and develop skills like speaking in public, interviewing, organizing, event planning and writing. It is also a way to form friendships and build professional networks based upon mutual enthusiasm and concerns. Perhaps the most valuable benefit is becoming a better-informed and more effective citizen!

Dues are determined by each local League and may include a discount for students. Some Leagues offer scholarships based on income.

## **What are my responsibilities as a LWV member?**

All members are valuable to League. To get the most from your League membership you can:

- Attend meetings. Read the material. Participate in the discussion.
- Promote the League to nonmembers and bring a friend to meetings.
- Call or write your legislators as an individual, respectfully expressing your concerns about issues or you can respond to action alerts as a League member.
- Volunteer for a job that suits you.
- Attend public meetings like school board, council, etc. wearing a LWV button.
- Make contributions over and above your dues if you can.

## **How can I stay informed about LWV happenings, opportunities, advocacy, and news?**

The best way to stay involved in the League is to participate at your local level. However, there are many ways to stay “in the know” for members that cannot attend meetings:

- Follow the League on social media: The League of Women Voters of the U.S. and the League of Women Voters of Minnesota are both active on Twitter and Facebook.
- Join the Voter – Virtual Edition – it’s a closed group where LWV Action Alerts and League events are posted.
- Sign up for email newsletters: Information about happenings can be delivered to your inbox if you sign up for LWV Minnesota and LWVUS emails.
- Check out the Leagues’ websites. LWV Minnesota posts important information at [www.lwvmn.org](http://www.lwvmn.org) and LWVUS does so at [www.lwv.org](http://www.lwv.org).
- Read the LWV Minnesota All Member Newsletter.

**What is Voters Service?** Yes, the LWV uses "voters" not "voter". This is the League's year-round effort to help citizens become informed voters.

Voters Service may include:

- Registering voters and providing voting information.
- Providing information on candidates and conducting candidate forums.
- Conducting legislative interviews.

As a nonpartisan organization that never endorses or opposes candidates, LWV is particularly well qualified to offer these services.

League members are encouraged to participate actively in political parties. The only limitations on such activity are those described under our [Nonpartisan Policy](#). There are also LWV publications and meetings designed to educate members and the public about our system of political parties.

Other activities may include training in practical politics (like how to run for office), observing public bodies at work, assisting school classes working on government, and providing speakers for community organizations.

### **What are Program, Study and Action?**

In LWV, "program" is not the agenda for a meeting or event. Instead it means the collection of governmental issues that League members have chosen for concerted study and action. The LWV program process is designed to involve the membership at almost every stage. You, the member, are given the opportunity to suggest the issues, choose the program, study the facts, agree on the position, and help take the action.

Leagues work simultaneously on local, state, and national issues. Local program includes items of interest to the local Leagues only and is adopted at the local LWV annual meeting. State program is adopted at state convention, national program at national convention. You will find all of LWV Minnesota positions in [Program for Action](#).

### **What is LWV Action?**

LWV leaders never 'take action' before study and agreement. Leagues act only on current positions and on LWV principles. Actions can include testimony, letters and phone calls to legislators, working in coalitions with other groups, community outreach, and media campaigns.

### **For more information:**

As a new member, you will want to visit the [LWV Minnesota Website](#) to see the [Nonpartisan Policy](#), the [Principles of League](#), and the [History of League](#). You will also want to make certain your information is current by entering it in [Member Updates](#).

[Subscribe](#) – Subscribe to Action Alerts, Capitol Letter and emails.

[LWV Minnesota Facebook](#) - like our Facebook Page

[The Voter - Virtual Edition](#) - join our Facebook group

### **Common League Definitions**

Action Alert	A request sent to members when action (phone calls, letters, emails, etc.) is needed on an issue or legislation.
Concurrence	The League process of agreeing with position already arrived at by resource committees, LWV Boards or other Leagues.
Consensus	LWV process of reaching member agreement through group discussion of an issue.
Convention	Held every two years for LWV delegates to adopt a program, elect officers and directors, amend bylaws and adopt a two-year budget. State Convention is held in May, during odd-numbered years. National Convention is held in even-numbered years.
Position	The League's point of view about an issue which forms the basis for League action. It is reached through study and either consensus or concurrence.
Program	The collection of governmental issues that LWV members have chosen for concerted study and action.
State Member	A member who is not in a Local LWV, but may belong to a State Unit.
State Unit	A state recognized group of members in an area where there is no local LWV.

### **Common League Acronyms**

ILO	Inter-League Organization—an officially recognized level of League that is composed of Leagues within a county, metropolitan area or region. It is a group of Leagues, not individual members. ILO's adopt bylaws, a budget, elect a board of directors and choose program for study and action.
LL's	Local League of Women Voters organizations.
LWVEF	League of Women Voters Education Fund—a separate branch of the League to which tax-deductible monies may be contributed. These can be used solely on publications and projects of a strictly educational nature, with no League positions or lobbying efforts involved.
LWVUS	League of Women Voters of the United States
MLD	Membership and Leadership Development--a support system for helping local Leagues thrive. It involves all levels of the League.
PMP	Per Member Payment – a portion of each member's dues that supports their state and national membership. Local dues are set by the local Boards, but PMP is set at both state and national conventions.

## LWV Minnesota Members Code of Conduct

**Purpose:** As we join together to advance the work of LWV Minnesota, we believe it is important to establish a Members Code of Conduct so that we have a common understanding and shared expectation of how we, a collective of individual members, will operate in the best interest of the organization.

**Code:** All members who join LWV Minnesota agree to the following:

1. Abide by the rules of the LWV Minnesota or the member's local league as set out in its Bylaws, Mission Statement and Shared Values;
2. Uphold the reputation and good standing of LWV Minnesota;
3. Act with integrity, show respect to others, and value alternative points of view;
4. Refrain from any behaviors or actions that are harassing, physically threatening, or physically or verbally abusive toward any LWV member, employee of LWV, or any attendee at any LWV sponsored function or event;
5. Do not commit LWV Minnesota to any action unless authorized to do so;
6. Refrain from making any statement on behalf of LWV Minnesota or purport to represent LWV Minnesota through any public medium, including digital social media, unless specifically authorized to do so by LWV Minnesota's President;
7. Act within the boundaries of relevant legislation;
8. Refrain from using the position of membership to unfairly benefit themselves;
9. Pay membership fees on a timely basis as part of continued membership.

**Policy:** LWV Minnesota reserves the right to review any membership for validity and conformity to the Code of Conduct and other applicable policies. If a member fails to meet the expectations in this Code of Conduct or other applicable policies, LWV Minnesota, in its sole discretion, will decide on the appropriate action to take, up to and including disassociation of membership. Local LWVs should bring all membership concerns to LWV Minnesota for resolution.

LWV Minnesota reserves the right to update, replace or rescind this Member Code of Conduct policy as well as develop additional policies as may be warranted. By applying for membership with LWV Minnesota members indicate acceptance and agreement with these terms of membership.

Approved by the LWV Minnesota Board of Directors January 2017